



## **Western Wayne County Project on Domestic and Sexual Violence**

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September 20, 2016

House Committee on Families, Children, and Seniors  
Anderson House Office Building - Room 327  
124 N. Capitol Avenue  
Lansing, MI 48909

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this letter as an expression of real and legitimate concern over **HR 327** and **HB 4141**. As a domestic and sexual violence service and advocacy organization for almost 40 years, First Step has witnessed thousands of survivors of violence and their children experiencing great injustices in the family court system, which has repeatedly put many of them in grave danger. HR 327 and HB 4141 further exasperates the absolute terror that these families face on a daily basis.

We know that when a convicted batterer is awarded joint custody, there are serious and immediate safety issues for all of the victims of the batterer's crimes. These children are at great risk for ongoing abuse, suicide, running away, extensive trauma, and even death. Joint custody already receives special consideration under Michigan law, however we believe it should have no presumptive superiority and should be disallowed if one parent has abused the other as it places too great a burden on the child(ren) in the family.

The notion of parental alienation syndrome has no scientific basis and has been widely discredited by mental health and legal experts. Yet it serves as a proven way for abusers to continue their power and control tactics over their victims, particularly by exploiting the children and minimizing/denying years of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. It has nothing to do with being a parent, just being in control.


We simply cannot support HR 327 or HB 4141. Putting these measures in place erodes years of advocacy on the behalf of survivors of violence and their children. Many times, children are the forgotten victims of these unspeakable crimes and HR 327 and HB 4141 does absolutely nothing to protect them.

In fact, batterers will use this ruling as a method of maintaining power and control through threats, violence, and intimidation. It will continue the generational cycle of violence by repeating the patterns of coercion and abuse.

Let's show our great state that Michigan cares about families and will take a long, hard look at each individual family and allow a parenting situation that puts the rights of children first. All of us deserve to live in a safe community and peaceful family. We cannot allow the perceived rights of abusers—violent criminals—to cloud our judgment.

First Step is taking a stand: zero tolerance for abuse, threats, and intimidation. Won't you join us?

Sincerely,

  
Desiree Herrick  
Associate Director

**CELEBRATING 38 YEARS OF WORKING FOR VIOLENCE-FREE HOMES AND COMMUNITIES**

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**24-Hour Help Line Toll Free: 1 (888) 453-5900**

**[www.firststep-mi.org](http://www.firststep-mi.org)**